

HOOSIER WOMEN AT WORK

STUDIES IN INDIANA WOMEN'S HISTORY

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Women's Contributions to Household Economy, Agriculture, and Education through Home Demonstration Clubs and Cooperative Extension Work

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Deciphering the scope of women's history has, historically, been hindered by the relative dearth of archival documents related to their life and work. Although the importance of historic cookbooks has been established for decoding the domestic sphere, foodways, and home life of women and their families, we must also recognize the role of women's work and the domestic sphere in household economies, technological advances, and the smashing of previously established boundaries.

Built upon an analysis of the archival collections of the Susan Bulkeley Butler Women's Archives housed at Purdue University, this presentation will explore the contributions made by women to the domestic sphere and beyond. In addition to the immediate impact of women's domestic work on the household and the household economy, this work also eventually contributed to new technologies and fields of study as well as provided for new career paths outside of the home for successive generations of women. Women's domestic and agricultural work was encouraged by and made more efficient by the outreach, engaged scholarship, and education efforts of home demonstration clubs and cooperative extension work. As these clubs and educational endeavors grew in size and scope, they also found growing financial and intellectual support from the University. At Purdue, this support was manifest in the creation of new departments and fields of study, the appointment of women instructors, and the recognition that some boundaries were more permeable than previously believed.

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